Nationalist Historians

R. C. Majumdar

Chapter 30 of
'Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon'
edited by C. H. Philips

First edition 1961
Reprinted 1962 and 1967

Oxford University Press
London

30. NATIONALIST HISTORIANS

R. C. MAJUMDAR

Formerly Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Nagpur University.
Vice-President of the International Commission for a History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind set up by U.N.E.S.C.O.

Historiography was practically unknown to the Hindus at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With the spread of English education in the second quarter of that century, the Indians began to learn, along with many other modern ideas, the value of historical knowledge, and also gained a great deal of information about the history not only of India but also of the whole world. A deep interest in the study of history and cultivation of the art of writing history may thus be said to have grown in India about the middle of the last century. Historiography in modern India, at least among the Hindus, is thus barely a century old.

Unfortunately the Hindus gained their first knowledge of the history of their own country from treatises which gave unmistakable evidence of deep-seated prejudices against the Hindu culture and civilization, both of the past and of the present times. The natural resentment against this had a twofold effect. It whetted their appetite to learn more of the historical facts which would enable them to refute the charges or calumnies in books written by the foreigners. At the same time it laid an undue emphasis on the duty of Indian students to study history with a view to vindicating their past culture against unfounded charges of the European writers. This considerably narrowed down the scope of history, and added an element of acerbity in historical judgement. It was partially responsible for occasional lapses of that detached attitude, balanced judgement, and proper perspective which form the basis of true history. It is only against this background that we can understand the real significance of the phrase 'nationalist historians', when applied to India. It is a comparative term to be used by way of contrast with the foreign historians, mainly British. It does not necessarily connote a body of men whose sole object was to glorify their country's past at any cost, though, as will be shown later, such a feeling was not always or altogether absent. Nor need the term be confined to Indians, for even Europeans, including Englishmen, indulged in theories and criticisms which distinguish the so-called nationalist historians of India. As a matter of fact, not unoften we find that even the most extreme views of nationalist historians of India were based on, or derived from, those propounded by European scholars.

For the purpose of present discussion, the designation 'nationalist historians' is confined to Indians. It is, however, difficult to draw a line between nationalist and other Indian historians. In a sense, it may be argued that some sort of nationalist bias may be traced among all Indian historians. But the same thing may be said, more or less, of historians of all nationalities, when writing the history of their own country. We therefore restrict the use of the term to those Indians who are not purely or merely actuated by a scientific spirit to make a critical study of an historical problem concerning India, like any other country, but whose primary or even secondary objects include an examination or re-examination of some points of national interest or importance, particularly those on which full or accurate information is not available or which have been misunderstood, misconceived or wrongly represented. Such an object is not necessarily in conflict with a scientific and critical study, and a nationalist historian is not, therefore, necessarily a propagandist or a charlatan.

Subject to these preliminary remarks, we may proceed to analyse the various forces that were at work in creating nationalist histories in India and giving them the shape, form or direction in which they have developed.

Broadly speaking, nationalist history of India was originally a reaction against the British histories of India, and later gathered its strength and inspiration from the awakening of national consciousness among the Indians. Still later, it received further impetus from the countrywide agitation for securing political rights which slowly merged itself into the movement to free India from the yoke of the British. In order to understand its origin and nature we must begin with an account of some typical text-books on Indian history, written by British authors, *which had a wide currency in India.*

The first in point of time was the *History of British India* by James Mill, published in 1818. He begins with an elaborate account of the Hindus and seeks to prove that the abject condition in which the English found them in the eighteenth century represents their normal condition throughout their history. He ridicules the 'hypothesis of a high state of civilisation' propounded by Sir William Jones in regard to the ancient Hindus and observes:[1]

> 'Their laws and institutions are adapted to the very state of society which those who visit them now behold, such as could neither begin, nor exist, under any other than one of the rudest and weakest states of the human mind. As the manners, the arts and sciences of the ancient Hindus are entirely correspondent with the state of their laws and institutions, everything we *know* of the ancient state of Hindustan conspires to prove that it was rude.'[2]

[1] James Mill, *The History of British India*, fifth edition (London, 1858), ii, 109.
[2] Ibid., p. 115.

In forming a comparative estimate, Mill declares that the people of Europe, even during the feudal ages, were greatly superior to the Hindus.[3] Proceeding further he observes: 'In truth, the Hindu like the Eunuch, excels in the qualities of a slave.'[4] A few lines further on he remarks: 'In the still more important qualities, which constitute what we call the moral character, the Hindu ranks very low.'[5] After all this, it scarcely surprises us to be told that 'it will not admit of any long dispute, that human nature in India gained, and gained very considerably, by passing from a Hindu to a Mohammadan government'.[6]

There is no doubt that Mill's view was primarily due to ignorance. But it is impossible to absolve him altogether of a deep-rooted prejudice against the Hindus. Speaking from the historical point of view, he committed the great blunder of reading the present into the past. Unfortunately, this sort of prejudice or blunder marked the average Englishman in India and, more or less, clouded the visions of subsequent English historians of India also, the difference being one of degree, not of kind. Elphinstone, for example, whose *History of India* was published in 1841, was very sympathetic to the Hindus. Yet it seemed to him extraordinary that the Arabs 'should not have overrun India as easily as they did Persia'.[7] He suggested all possible and impossible reasons for this, but never even hinted at the only rational explanation that would have occurred to any unprejudiced mind, viz. that the Hindu rulers had strength enough to resist the Arabs. Again, in the face of the clear testimony of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, regarding the maritime activities of the Indians, Elphinstone tacitly assumed that the trade was 'conducted by Greeks and Arabs'.[8] Though he admits the trade intercourse between India and western countries by land or sea at an even earlier date, he regarded it as 'uncertain whether the natives of India took a share in it beyond their own limits'.[9] Elphinstone's *History of India* was a standard text-book in the examinations of the Indian Civil Service in England and the Universities in India as far back as 1866, or perhaps even earlier. The young Englishmen formed their notion of the Hindus, over whom they ruled with iron hand, from a book which contains such passages as: 'The most prominent vice of the Hindus is want of veracity, in which they outdo most nations even of the East.'[10]

The third great English historian of India, V. A. Smith, writing at the beginning of this century, emphasized, in his account of ancient India, 'the inherent weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline',[11] and prophesied the inevitable relapse of

[3] Ibid., p. 148. [4] Ibid., p. 365. [5] Ibid., p. 366. [6] Ibid., p. 342.
[7] Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, ninth edition (London, 1916), p. 305.
[8] Ibid., p. 183. [9] Ibid., p. 182. [10] Ibid., p. 213.
[11] V. A. Smith, *The Early History of India*, second edition (Oxford, 1908), p. 109. For comments on this, cf. R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient India* (Banaras, 1952), p. 109.

India into political chaos, which has been her normal condition, except for rare intervals, 'if the hands of the benevolent despotism which now holds her in its iron grasp should be withdrawn'.[12]

I have mentioned these three historians because they were the leading authorities on the subject so far as an average Indian was concerned; for even in the first decade of this century, when I was a college student, all the three books were prescribed as text-books for Indian history. To an Indian mind, therefore, these three books, to which others may be easily added, represent the general trend of Englishmen's views from the beginning to the end of British rule.

Several other tendencies among European writers may be clearly noted throughout the nineteenth century. Even when positive evidence was being brought to light about the past greatness of the Hindus, there was a conscious and deliberate effort to minimize its importance. This was sought to be done by various ways. One was to deny the antiquity of Indian culture by suggesting the lowest possible (or even impossible) date for her literary works like the Vedas and Epics. Another method was to belittle this culture by suggesting that Indians borrowed most, if not the whole, of their culture from the Greeks[13] and where that appeared to have no basis, from the Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians, etc. Wherever there was the least similarity between Indian and foreign ideas, Indians were taken to be the borrowers. The Epics were supposed to be indebted to Homer's works, Indian drama, mathematics, philosophy, and astronomy were derived from the Greeks, and even Krishnacult was derived from Christ. The very poor evidence on which such theses were boldly enunciated, even by learned scholars, demonstrated a prejudiced mind rather than bad logical deduction or inference.

The third method was to belittle the value of Indian culture by selecting or stressing only its weak points and ignoring its better aspects.

A class of writers, more particularly the Christian missionaries, took special care to bring into prominent relief the social abuses, religious superstitions, and those actions of the Hindu gods and goddesses, and corrupt practices sanctioned by Hinduism which were grossly immoral or

[12] Ibid., p. 331.

[13] The following passage may be read with interest in this connection: 'We know that the trigonometric sine is not mentioned by Greek mathematicians and astronomers, that it was used in India from the Gupta period onwards (third century) . . . The only conclusion possible is that the use of sines was an Indian development and not a Greek one. But Tannery, persuaded that the Indians could not have made any mathematical inventions, preferred to assume that the sine was a Greek idea not adopted by Hipparchus, who gave only a table of chords. For Tannery, the fact that the Indians knew of sines was sufficient proof that they must have heard about them from the Greeks.' J. Needham, 'History of Science and Technology in India and South-east Asia', *Proceedings of the National Institute of Sciences of India*, xviii, No. 4 (1952), p. 360 (reprinted from *Nature*, vol. 168, 14 July 1951, pp. 64 ff.). 'Paul Tannery, so famous for his studies on ancient mathematics' (ibid.), represents a type, not an individual.

highly obnoxious to modern minds. But their righteous indignation was not provoked by similar abuses in their own society and religion.

Thus while the burning of widows was regarded as a barbarous trait in Hindu culture, no thought was given to the burning of heretics in Europe. While caste system was condemned, no reference was made, even for the sake of comparison, to the slavery and serfdom in ancient and medieval Europe, and the treatment of the 'blacks' by the 'whites' in modern times.

Generally speaking, the European writers, with a few honourable exceptions, were guilty of this kind of partisan national spirit, and often indulged in the habit of comparing the Hindu with the European culture by contrasting the worst features of the former with the best aspects of the latter.

The inevitable reaction was not long in coming. The Hindus, particularly the English-educated class, were provoked beyond measure by the general tone of English writers and were eager to accept the challenge. The response to the arrogant claims of superiority by the British writers and their belittling of the Hindu culture took various forms and covered a wide range. It would be a laborious task to trace in detail the growth of Indian reaction to various points at issue in chronological stages of development, and it must suffice to take a broad view and analyse the main trends of thought.

As could be easily anticipated, the cause of Hindu religion and its sacred literature was taken up first. The attitude was both defensive and aggressive. Minds influenced by the rationalist spirit made an attempt to prove that Hindu religion and society mean only the purer forms as enunciated in the Vedas, and that the later growths do not deserve that appellation. Thus the worship of images, degraded forms of caste-system, and many abuses that crept into Hindu religion and society in later times —things which formed the targets of European criticism—were all sought to be swept away as so many accretions of degenerate times. The extreme form of this view is represented by Dayananda Saraswati, who put a new interpretation upon the Vedas, differing radically both from the traditional as well as western, in order to prove that they contain the most rational ideas on every subject and even anticipated the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century.

Another school sought to prove that Hinduism, taken in all its aspects of development, formed a highly spiritual force, and justified the social evils and religious superstitions by giving them a new interpretation and a spiritual significance. This school is represented at its best by Rajnarain Bhose, Bhudev Mukherji, Chandra Nath Basu, Bankim Chandra Chatterji and others, while one of its extreme and extravagant exponents was Sasadhar Tarkachudamani. This school not only defended Hinduism

against all criticism by foreigners, but asserted the superiority of Hinduism to all other religions, particularly Christianity.

The material side of Hindu culture was also defended with equal zeal against European criticism, and this task was facilitated by the Europeans themselves. The archaeological discoveries and researches in ancient Indian history, carried on mostly by them, revealed a number of valuable and interesting data which were utilized by Indians to disprove the inferiority of Hindu culture, *vis-à-vis* the western, so long asserted by the Europeans. The writings of Rajendralal Mitra and Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and a few others show Indian scholarship at its best. The results of the researches of these Indian scholars and a galaxy of distinguished oriental scholars of Europe were brought together in three compendious volumes entitled *Civilization in Ancient India* by R. C. Dutt, in the closing years of the eighties of the last century. This may be regarded as the first nationalist history in the best sense of the term. It is 'nationalist' more in a negative than in a positive sense. In other words, it is free from the prejudiced outlook of European writers which had hitherto dominated the works of Indian history. But it is equally free from the extravagant nationalist sentiments of the Indians which were provoked by it. This does not mean that Mr. Dutt's book is free from errors. But the errors are mostly those of judgement and ignorance of facts, and very rarely, if at all, the outcome of a preconceived national bias. This is best evidenced by the fact that the book did not fully satisfy either the Hindus or the Europeans. The orthodox Hindus held that life in the Vedic age was more spiritual, more pious, and contemplative in its tone and character, than that depicted in the book, and they refused to accept its account of the rude self-assertion and boisterous greed for conquests of the Vedic warriors. On the other hand, the Europeans took the opposite view. Dr. Kern observed, while reviewing the book, that 'some scholars delight in describing all that was robust and manly and straightforward in the character of the Vedic Hindus, while others portray their coarseness and imperfections'. He was of opinion that Dutt adhered to the first school, but that the truth lies midway.

Whatever we may think of Kern's criticism, it has to be admitted that the rationalist outlook of Mr. Dutt is sadly lacking in much that was written by Indians in later times. This will be best understood from a reference to extreme views on certain points.

As regards the antiquity of Hindu civilization Dutt followed more or less the views of Max Müller, but later Indian writers have carried it much further back. B. G. Tilak referred the Vedas to third millennium B.C. while A. C. Das placed the composition of at least some hymns of the Rigveda to ancient geological epochs, probably before the end of the Tertiary epoch.

While stressing the infinite superiority of Hinduism in the spiritual field,

attempt was made to show that ancient India was not much behind modern Europe even in scientific achievements. It was claimed that not only firearms of bigger size, but even aeroplanes were known in the age represented by the Epics. Dr. R. K. Mookcrji's book, *A History of Indian Shipping and Maritime Activity* was a rejoinder to Elphinstone's assumption mentioncd above.

While a class of Europeans was anxious to prove that Indian culture was mostly derived from foreign sources, some Indian scholars declared with equal vehemence that India was almost immune from any outside influence. Actuated by the samc spirit, it has been strongly held by a section of Indian scholars that India was the original home of the Aryans and they spread from this country to Europe.

The criticism of social abuses was mct in two different ways. Some denied, for example, that the caste system was an ancient system, while others justified it by specious arguments about division of labour, and the analogy of similar institutions in Europcan countries.

The same procedure was followed in regard to the position of women. It was pointed out by somc that the status of women in the Vedic period was very high and that thcy also occupied an honourable position in later times. On the other hand, their secluded life and position of inferiority were justified by others on social, economic, religious, and spiritual grounds, and the low or degraded position of women in many respects, even in Europe, was sought to be provcd as an indirect justification.

So far, we have dealt with the effect of reaction provoked by European writers on Indian history. A further impetus to the nationalist historians was given by the growth of national consciousness among the Indians, mainly caused by the spread of English education, and through it, of western ideas. Its first effect was a demand for higher political status mainly by the institution of popular Government on the western model. All the objections which the British Government advanced against such concessions were sought to be met by arguments based on Indian history.

The British were never tired of repeating that India was not a country but a congeries of smaller States, and the Indians were not a nation but a conglomeration of pcoples of diverse creeds and sects. The nationalist arguments against this view were summed up in a scholarly treatise entitled *The Fundamental Unity of India*, by Dr. R. K. Mookerji. The religious unity and spiritual fellowship among the Hindus all over India was held to be the basis of nationalism which overrode barriers of language and distance; the ideals of an all-India Empire and full or partial realization of it in the past, were stressed in justification of its demands for the present.

In order to prove the fitness of the Indians for democratic type of Government prevailing in the West, the history of the republican tribes in

India, to which attention was drawn by Rhys Davids, formed the subject of a good deal of study and research. But sober attempts in this direction were marred by extravagant claims made by writers of the type of K. P. Jayaswal. He sought to prove that not only a constitutional form of Government, but the entire parliamentary system, including Address to the Throne and Voting of Grants, was prevalent in ancient India. He also gave a new interpretation to many words and passages in inscriptions and literary texts in order to prove that responsible Government, with all that it implies in the West, existed in ancient India with its full paraphernalia.

With the growth of nationalist sentiment, the Hindus began to lay great stress on their heroic fights against Muslims. Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* served as a model and a store-house of materials. Inspiring historical accounts were written of the long-drawn-out struggles between the Rājputs and the Muslims, in which the Rājputs almost always came out with flying colours. Similarly in delineating the history of the Marāthās, great stress was laid on their successful campaigns against the Muslims, inspired by the ideal of founding a Hindu Empire (*Hindu Pad Padshahi*). Their treatment of the Rājputs and plundering raids against the Hindus were either forgotten or ignored. Similarly the alleged faults of Shivaji were either exonerated or minimized, and sometimes even explained away. The Sikhs also appeared as fighters for freedom against both the British and the Muslims. Ranjit Singh became the ideal statesman and the battle of Chilianwala counted as a victory of the Sikhs. The heroic activities of the Rājputs, Marāthās, and Sikhs were cast into a new mould to suit the spirit of the time. So modified, they became popular themes and formed the subject-matter of novels, stories and poems written by such eminent men as Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath and R. C. Dutt.

There was also a psychology behind all this. Hindus wanted to remove the stigma of their easy defeat at the hands of the British, and refute the view of the British Government that they were unable to protect India without their help. As all this implied deficiency in military skill and lack of bravery and heroism, the historic examples of the Rājputs, Marāthās, and Sikhs were enlisted in support of their claim for military greatness.

Urged by the same motive, the Hindu historians sought to belittle the military achievements of the British. The Battle of Plassey, which laid the foundation of the British rule, was held to be the result of treachery, but no great importance was attached to the successive British victories against Mir Kasim and Shah Alam. English victories in the Sikh wars were set down to bribery of the Sikh leaders, but Chilianwala was quoted as an evidence of the superiority of Sikh military skill. Above all, they were never tired of pointing out that it was mainly with the help of Indian soldiers that the British had won India. Not much notice was taken of the numerous battles, like those at Kirkee or Sitabaldi, in which a handful of

troops commanded by the British defeated Indian soldiers more than ten times their number.

With the development of nationalism and political consciousness, the nationalist history was also marked by an intense hatred against the British. The activities of the British Government, as well as of individual Britishers, were painted in the blackest colours. The economic exploitation of India, involving ruin of trade and industry, and impoverishment of India almost to the level of starvation, formed the theme of laborious works of men like Dadābhai Naoroji and R. C. Dutt, who followed in the footsteps of Digby. Their moderate tone offers a striking contrast to the writings of Major B. D. Basu who made a long catalogue of the evil deeds, errors of omission and commission, of the British in both economic and political spheres. His books are profusely documented, and his charges, supported by facts and figures, are not easy to refute. But his scathing comments leave no doubt that his main object was to draw a lurid picture of the British in India and to arraign them before the bar of public opinion of the world. Historical criticism of various measures of the Indian Government, both in regard to internal administration and in respect of Native States, was definitely marred by a nationalist bias. The most glaring example of the former is furnished by the almost unanimous condemnation of the policy of promoting English education which was represented as a deliberate move only to prepare a set of clerks. As to the latter, Dalhousie's policy of annexing Native States was strongly condemned, though a hundred years later highest praises were reserved for the man who followed it in a more thoroughgoing way and by far more dictatorial methods.

Individuals, especially those who distinguished themselves in founding the British Empire, like Clive, Warren Hastings, and Wellesley, came in for a good deal of criticism. It comprised both well-deserved condemnation and unmerited censure, but there was an unmistakable animus in these writings inspired by nationalist feelings. As an instance, a reference may be made to a book entitled *Clive, the Forger*. A lack of balanced judgement, accompanied by a truculent mood, was also in evidence in criticisms of frankly reactionary Viceroys like Lytton and Curzon. Correspondingly, those who opposed the British were regarded with sympathy, sometimes much more than they deserved. Siraj-ud-Daula and Mir Kasim were represented as great heroes and patriots, fighting to the last for the sake of their country. The Black-hole tragedy was repudiated as a myth, and the massacres of Monghyr were lightly passed over. Even Nandakumar was hailed as a great martyr.

The aversion towards the English also found good scope in severe denunciation of the colonial imperialism of the British, and, in particular, their attitude towards the Boers and the Irish. The hypocrisy of the British and their unlimited greed for power and pelf were taken for granted.

Napoleon's description of the British as a nation of shopkeepers struck the right chord in the heart of the Indians, and formed the basis of their judgement of English character.

The struggle for freedom against the British, which took a definite shape early in this century, intensified some of these anti-British feelings, and introduced new ones. Besides, it ushered in a new type of nationalist movement in Indian historiography. This may be generalized as a deliberate re-interpretation of Indian history in order to infuse enthusiasm in the fight for freedom and sustain or strengthen the cherished creeds and slogans of the Indian political leaders. An instance of the former is afforded by the re-naming of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 as the Indian War of Independence. V. D. Savarkar's book with this title is a typical specimen of the representation of history from an extremely nationalist point of view.

Hindu-Muslim unity was believed by the political leaders to be a *sine qua non* for ultimate success in the fight for freedom, particularly as the British Government held out the differences between the two communities as the chief obstacle to the grant of Dominion Status to India. The entire history of India during the Muslim period was accordingly re-interpreted in order to prove that the Hindus and Muslims always behaved towards each other like good brothers and formed one nation; that the Hindus were not a subject people during the so-called Muslim period, and that it is the British who for the first time imposed foreign rule upon India. Even a man like Lala Lajpat Rai supported all this with elaborate arguments in his *Young India*, and a committee set up by the Congress published a voluminous treatise in support of this thesis. Dr. Tarachand's book, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, is another attempt in the same direction, though more divorced from historical facts, and less justified on grounds of national exigency.

The growth of party politics had full repercussion on history. The history of the political struggle during the first half of this century has been deeply coloured by the political views of the party to which the author belonged. The two books, *Indian National Evolution* and *Indian Politics since the Mutiny*, written respectively by A. C. Majumdar and C. Y. Chintamani, two veteran members of the Moderate party, and *A Nation in the Making*, an autobiographical memoir of Surendranath Banerji, one of the great leaders of the party, are more or less party pamphlets rather than sober history. The two books written by Hiren Mukherji[14] and R. Palme Dutt[15] plainly betray the influence of communist ideals. It is hardly necessary to refer to numerous other historical writings of the period which are frankly propagandist and are deeply coloured by the ideologies of the Revolutionary, Socialist, Communist, and other parties.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that the nationalist school of

[14] *India struggles for Freedom* (Bombay, 1946).

[15] *India Today* (Bombay, 1947).

history has not vanished from India with the achievement of independence. Ideas and notions, once acquired, die hard, and many historical conceptions or slogans which were clearly the outcome of political exigencies during the period of struggle for freedom, have come to stay, even though the necessity of the same has disappeared. In addition, fresh tendencies are gathering force, which, if unchecked, would again pervert the history of India. The non-violent method of struggle against the British, initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, has now become a regular creed with an influential section of people, and they are re-interpreting Indian history in order to prove that 'non-violence' has been the eternal creed in Indian politics. Whether such a view, opposed to all known facts of Indian history, except the isolated case of Asoka, would ultimately succeed in re-shaping or modifying the history of India, it is difficult to say. But the signs are not very propitious.

Another ominous tendency is a sharp turn towards orthodoxy in interpreting the religious institutions and social ideas of the past. It seems to be due to the psychological tendency to connect the political bondage to the West with the ideological changes brought about by western influence. So the freedom from one naturally cries for freedom from the other. The desire to remodel India according to the genius of Indian culture is natural enough, and welcome within certain limits. But it involves a clear conception of what Indian culture is, and this gives a tempting opportunity to re-shape Indian history. In a democratic age, everyone seems to assume that a knowledge of Indian history is a birthright of every Indian, and requires no patient study or research. So different images of Indian culture are being formed by different interpretations of Indian history according to individual idea, taste, or fancy.

Orthodoxy being a more potent force in Indian society, there lies the danger of nationalist Indian history taking a sharp turn towards the right. But the opposite tendency of a sharp turn towards the left is also not altogether lacking. The newly acquired ideal of a 'secular State' is opposed to all known facts of Indian history. But it is sought to be buttressed by a new conception of Indian history and culture, which recognizes no distinct Hindu or Muslim culture in modern India, and looks upon these, along with European or western culture, as so many streams meeting together only to mingle and lose their separate entities in the sea of Indian culture. The Muslims, however, repudiate any such idea, and Islamic culture is not only recognized as a distinct entity, but has been formally adopted as the basis of the new State of Pakistan. In India, however, a small but gradually increasing class of influential persons now fight shy of the term 'Hindu' as a designation of a cultural unit, and only think in terms of an Indian culture. Whatever may be the value of such an idea in shaping India's culture, it becomes positively dangerous when it encroaches upon

the domain of Indian history and seeks to ignore the existence of Hindu culture as one of the most potent and patent facts of Indian history even today.

Having thus discussed some of the main trends of the nationalist history in India, it is necessary to say a few words about its merits and defects. As regards the latter, broad hints have been given above how nationalist historians not unoften deviated from the true principles of historical study in order to support a particular point of view. In extreme cases and due to political exigencies, they ignored patent facts of history or deliberately misrepresented them, or drew important conclusions from extremely insufficient data. In many cases, the judgement was warped by strong political or party feelings, and history was made a handmaid of current political agitation, or party propaganda. In short, the nationalist history of India exhibits more or less the same defects as are inherent in national histories of any other country.

On the credit side, it must be remembered that the study of history in India received its first impetus from nationalist sentiment and was largely sustained by it throughout the British period. A good many historical works, belonging to the 'nationalist' class, in spite of their professed or implied nationalist tendency, deservedly occupy a very high place. A great deal of patient and industrious study has been devoted by Indian scholars in various branches of history, particularly the economic condition of India during the British period, and the progress of the ancient Hindus in such fields as political thought, administrative organization, trade, and maritime activity, fine arts, and positive sciences, where they were least expected to achieve any distinction at all. The share of the Indians in the reconstruction of their political and social history is also not negligible. Above all, they have made a new approach to the study of Indian history. They have stressed the point that the political or dynastic history, the materials for which India lacks, is not necessarily the only or even the main aspect of 'history', but have rightly drawn our attention to the cultural history for which India has abundant materials. Therein also lies, according to them, the true history of India. This idea was adumbrated by Rabindranath in his inimitable language, and has now caught the imagination of India. The importance of the part of India lying to the south of the Vindhyas has been fully realized from this point of view, and due importance had been attached to the synthesis of Aryan and Dravidian culture. A great change has come in their outlook of modern times. 'The true history of India during the British period does not consist of the activities of the East India Company or of its successor, the British Crown, but of the upheaval which led to the transformation of Indian society, through the activities of India's own sons.' K. M. Panikkar's book, *A Survey of Indian History*, published in 1947, from which the above sentence is quoted, may

be looked upon as one of the most recent nationalist histories, and the following passage from it throws an interesting light on the nationalist historians of today:

> 'Ever since India became conscious of her nationhood . . . there was a growing demand for a history of India which would try and reconstruct the past in a way that would give us an idea of our heritage. Brought up on text books written by foreigners whose one object would seem to have been to prove that there was no such thing as "India", we had each to "discover India for ourselves". I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that it was a spiritual adventure for most of us to gain in some measure an understanding of the historical processes which have made us what we are and to evaluate the heritage that has come down to us through five thousand years of development.'

Much of their efforts in all the various directions noted above may be traced to nationalist sentiment, but the result shows that such sentiments are not incompatible with a high standard of achievement.

Time is perhaps not yet ripe for a proper valuation of the nationalist history of India. It would be an interesting study to institute a comparison between the deviation from the correct historical standard to which Indian history has been subjected by the nationalist sentiments of Indians on the one hand and the nationalist-cum-imperialistic ideas of Englishmen on the other. The consequences of the withdrawal of British power from India and the benefits of British rule formed the subjects of keen and acrimonious dispute between Indian and English nationalist schools. The truth of the assertions and assumptions, so confidently made on both sides in this connection on the basis of historical study, may now be partially tested in the light of actual events in India, since she attained her independence. Nine years' time is no doubt a very short period in the history of a nation, and no final judgement is possible on the results of such a short experiment. Still many predictions on both sides have proved to be false, and many defects in both the points of view already strike a discerning eye. It is difficult for an Indian or an Englishman of the present generation to pass a correct judgement on the relative merits or demerits of the history of India which was influenced by the nationalist sentiment either of Indians or of Englishmen. But there is no doubt that there were nationalist histories of India of both these types, and both seriously erred, though in opposite directions. The extent of their errors must be left to the verdict of history.

PDF created by Rajesh Arya - Gujarat